

BREEDERS OF OUR TIME:

By Kathryn Dick



Taking centre stage in this week's Breeders of our Time is the well-respected Limousin breeder, William Smith, whose hard work and dedication to the breed have left a lasting legacy in the world of pedigree cattle.

William Smith



WILLIAM SMITH with Millbrook Nelenya, which claimed the Limousin championship, junior inter-breed title and reserve supreme inter-breed at Balmoral Show, in 2019

BACKGROUND?

I grew up on a farm in Millbrook, Oldcastle, Co Meath, and was the second eldest of six children. My father bred Hereford and Simmental cattle along with suckler cows on the farm.

I left school at 15 to help out on the farm with the intention of going to agricultural college when my older brother, John, finished school and was going to stay home for a year.

Unfortunately, John got leukaemia before this happened and died at the age of 19. It was a tough time for all the family, especially my parents.

WHAT GOT YOU INTO BREEDING LIMOUSINS?

A very good friend of my father, William Mulligan from Banbridge, Co Down, would visit regularly and, to hear him talk about the breed and what it had to offer, lit a fuse within me.

So, at the age of 20, I started my herd with four females; a cow, an in-calf heifer and two heifer calves. All cattle in the Millbrook prefix are descended from these animals.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST BIG SHOW?

The first big success of a show was in 1999 when Millbrook Lancelot stood supreme champion at the Royal Show and went on to win the Burke Trophy with Ronick Janita - the first time for the Limousin breed. This was a very special memory.

We held a farm sale in 2003 and that was a special day with the top price paid for a Limousin in Ireland of €42,000gns, which is still a record today.

WHICH WAS THE BEST ANIMAL THAT YOU'VE EVER BRED?

History is the only judge of this and, in my case, it had to be Millbrook Gingerspice - not only as a show animal but also as a brood cow. She was one of a kind.

In her successes at Balmoral, - in 2012, 2013 and 2014 - she was placed champion by three of the best breeders of Limousin cattle in the British Isles -

Christine Williams, Wilodge, Stephen Illingworth, Glenrock; and Bruce Goldie, Goldies herd. The fact that they chose her as champion speaks volumes to me.

BUT WHAT WAS THE BEST ANIMAL YOU'VE EVER SEEN?

I don't know if I could choose, so I'll be Irish and take three. The first was a Simmental cow, Star Fanny, in the 1981 Royal Dublin Spring Show. I'll never forget the sight of her in the shed and she emerged just as well in the show ring.

The second was The Bandit, from Ewan and Donald MacPherson. I went over to visit a school friend working in London on the buildings and the plan was to go to Smithfield for two days. We met and headed straight to Earl's Court where we saw The Bandit win his class, and I knew that I had seen something special.

We went back to my friend's flat and started to drink hot whiskeys from a very large bottle of duty-free Paddy. Having consumed three-quarters of the bottle, we headed out for fish and chips. I still recall the grease dripping out from the bottom of the bag ... but Christ they were good!

The next morning I was awakened by the sound

of my friend having a very loud conversation with God through the toilet. Little did I know that within 30 minutes, I would also go to service!

With breakfast eaten, we headed to Earl's Court to see The Bandit win the supreme championship. Then, later on, being slow learners, we repeated the same process as the evening before. What a Smithfield experience, what a great memory and what a beast!

The third was Millbrook Gingerspice as a two-year-old in Balmoral. When she left the stall heading towards the ring with my brother, Mark, on the halter, she was awesome. The best Limousin I have seen in a show ring - not being biased or anything!

I do believe that history is the only judge and in the case of Star Fanny and Millbrook Gingerspice - both have left a great mark on their respective breeds.

YOU'RE MOST ABIDING MEMORY?

I think as a breeder, when Millbrook Gingerspice won in Balmoral as a young heifer at 15 months, having never been shown before and going on to not only win the Limousin championship, but both the overall and junior inter-breed was very special to myself and Mark who was showing her.

BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT?

In farming, there are always highs and lows and the loss of any calf always hurts. It is disappointing and never gets easier, particularly when it happens as a result of a bad decision on my part.

MOST INFLUENTIAL PERSON IN YOUR CAREER?

Having worked with my father all my life, I got a great grounding from him in livestock husbandry. My wife and children let me off with nothing and are a great support and challenge to me.

Also my brother, Mark - who shows cattle with me - is a springboard for ideas and a great help.

YOUR CHOICE OF BEST BREEDER EVER?

This is a generation answer for me. In my formative years and as a breeder of Simmentals and Limousins, my idols were Billy Robson, Kilbride Farm; Matt Ridley, Haltcliffe; Jim Goldie, Goldies; Billy Glazebrook; William Mulligan; and Roger McCarrick.

Of my peers, there's Pat Greaney, James McKay, Bruce Goldie, Christine Williams, Stephen Illingworth, Archie MacGregor, Dougie McBeath



GINGERSPICE STOOD overall Limousin champion and supreme inter-breed at Balmoral Show, in 2014. She is also the dam to the 250,000gns world record breaking Limousin heifer, Posh Spice

and Craig Ridley. All of these breeders and stock people have left a huge mark on the breeding industry and on me.

The next generation also worth a mention: Gareth Small, Thomas Illingworth, Andrew Gammie, Sophie Harvey, Stephanie Dick, John MacGregor, plus Jennifer and Drew Hyslop, to name a few who are incredibly talented young stock people.

BEST AND WORST ADVICE YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED?

Best advice: No 1 - Get as much advice and information as possible to select a sire to use on a cow. But make sure that you take ownership of your decision for good and bad. You're forever learning.

No 2 - The most important thing that you have is your

name and reputation. Be honest and true in breeding and judging and you can always hold your head high.

Worst advice: There's no such thing, only the opportunity to learn. That's my experience.

BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENT?

In life, that would be getting married and staying married for 27 years and still being totally in love.

With regards to cattle, I would say creating a herd name that is recognised to have bred good Limousin cattle over the years. Also, I treasure the many good friends I made throughout the UK and Ireland through pedigree breeding.

ANY HOBBIES OR INTERESTS OUTSIDE OF FARMING?

I like watching all sports and I particularly love Irish football (Gaelic), which I played for more than 20 years. I enjoyed the competitive nature of the game as well as playing for my parish with my friends and neighbours - great days and memories.

When I retired, I coached youth teams of boys and girls at different stages up to a few years ago. I also enjoy spending time with my family.